Design Resource

Buddhist Woodcarving - Himachal Pradesh

Tibetan Style of Wood Art

by
Prof. Bibhudutta Baraland Hariharasudan T.
NID, Bengaluru

Source:
https://www.dsource.in/resource/buddhist-woodcarving-himachal-pradesh

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details

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Introduction

Buddhist woodcarving is a traditional way of Tibetan woodcarving that aims to empower culture through designs based on nature. Dating back its origin to the seventh century, the art motifs used bear inspirations from nature, spiritual awareness, and religious symbols. The delicate carving work is commonly found on crossbeams of houses, furniture, doors, and window frames, virtually inspired by ancient Buddhist architecture. At times, these carvings bear philosophical descriptions and religious significance also, as the Tibetan culture is closely intertwined with Buddhism. This unique style of wood carvings is still under constant innovation for higher standards by expert artists who hold vast knowledge of motifs and design patterns. It reconciles the traditional art with the modern, seeking to expand the valuable cognizance of Tibetan values and their expression in art and literature.

The carving bearing Buddhist symbols are regarded among the special ones, as it depicts the core theories of the religion. Tashi Takgye or eight auspicious symbols, namely parasol, golden fish, treasure vase, lotus, conch shell, endless knot, victory banner, and wheel; forms the primary designs learned by a beginner. Here each symbol represents an aspect of Buddhist teaching and is believed to intensify the power when they appear together. In classical times, woodcarvers were rendered the position of architects and also engineers. They took the responsibility of constructing the building beams, fitting the wooden panels together. The wood and shapes used are analyzed carefully to figure the approach so that the weight could be balanced evenly. The application of this style of architecture can be found at ancient temples and palaces even today. Thus with passing generations, the woodcarvers at Norbulingka grasped the techniques of precisely fitting the joints of any wood products without using any nails or hinges.

Training on Buddhist wood carving starts with elaborate drawing practice. The beginner starts with traditional designs on paper and is not allowed to work on wood until they are competent in drawing. For practice on wood, pinewood is usually recommended for beginners as it is much softer than teakwood, which is usually preferred by experts. The student simultaneously also masters the fundamentals of carpentry like cutting and joining the wooden pieces without any hardware. After the completion of studentship, which may last upto 13 years, they are then let to try elaborate carvings of thrones and shrine-rooms of monasteries. Thus the artistry has passed from generation to artisans at Norbulingka, Himachal Pradesh, rendering elegant products.

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Senior artisan named Mr. Phuntsok is working with Buddhist wooden carving for around 25 years.

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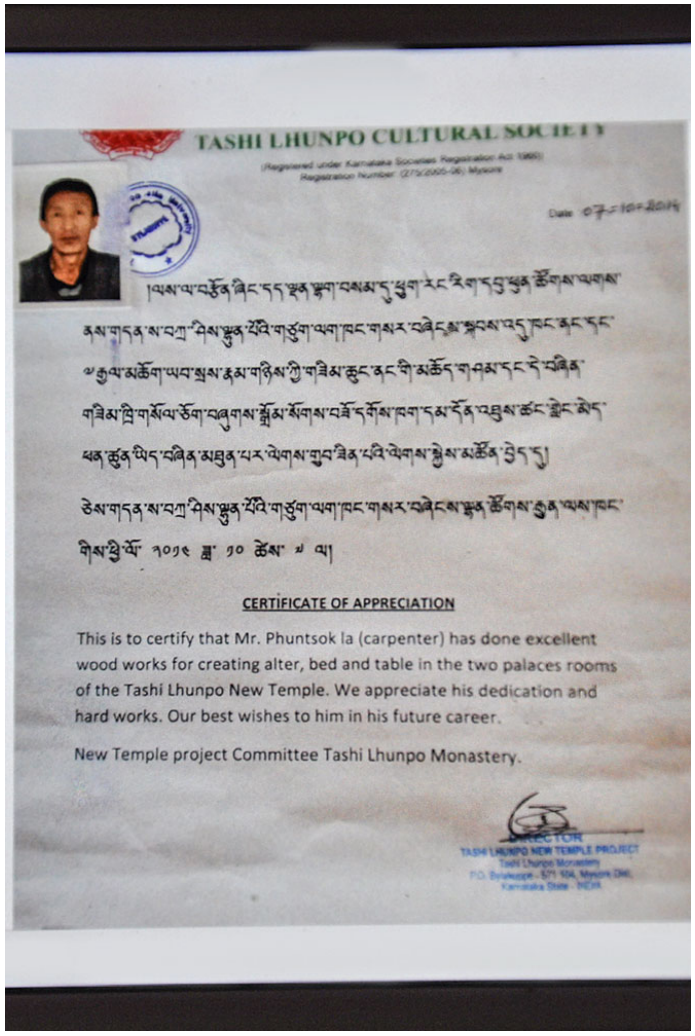
TASHI LHUNPO CULTURAL SOCIETY

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

This is to certify that Mr. Phuntsok la (carpenter) has done excellent wood works for creating alter, bed and table in the two palaces rooms of the Tashi Lhunpo New Temple. We appreciate his dedication and hard works. Our best wishes to him in his future career.

New Temple project Committee Tashi Lhunpo Monastery.

Mr. Phuntsok is being certified for sculpting the bed and table to palace rooms of the Tashi Lhunpo new temple.

Artisan named Dhargay is exuberant on the traditional Buddhist woodcarving.

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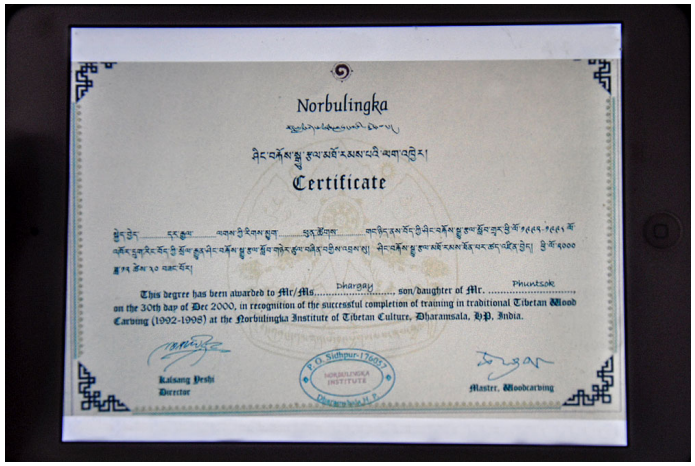
Norbulingka

Certificate

This degree has been awarded to Mr/Ms. Dhargay son/daughter of Mr. Phuntsok on the 30th day of Dec 2000, in recognition of the successful completion of training in traditional Tibetan Wood Carving (1992-1998) at the Norbulingka Institute of Tibetan Culture, Dharamsala, H.P, India.

Kaisang Peshi
Director

Master, Woodcarving

Mr. Dhargay has completed the traditional woodcarving course at Norbulingka Institue.

The professionalism of the artisan is to be noticed in the perseverance of his work.

The ingress to get through the making of Buddhist wooden carving.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Tools and raw materials that are used for the Buddhist woodcarvings are:

- **Wood:** It is the basic raw material used for making Buddhist wood carving products.
- **Band Saw:** It is used for cutting the wood in asymmetrical shapes.
- **Motorized Coping Saw:** This motorized coping saw is used for cutting intricate shapes of wood.
- **Sandpaper:** It is used for smoothening the surface of the wood.
- **Tri square:** It is used for measuring and marking the wood.
- **Chisels:** Chisels are used for carving the wood into the chosen design.
- **Handsaw:** Handsaw is used for cutting the wood in different shapes. .
- **Hammer:** Hammer is used while chiseling the wood.
- **Wood Scrapper:** It is a wood scrapping tool that helps in removing the rough surface area of wood.
- **Orbital Sander:** It is used for sanding the wood surface.
- **Pencil:** It is used for tracing the design on the wood.
- **Tracing Sheet:** By using the tracing sheet, the design is transferred onto the wood.
- **Brush:** It is used for dusting the wooden particles.
- **Varnish:** It is used for polishing purposes.
- **Enamel:** It is applied to the wooden product to enhance its beauty.

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Pine tree wood is used in Buddhist woodcarving.

Dissimilar types of tools are used on wood carving.

Scrapper is used for leveling the wood surface.

An orbital sander is used to smooth the wood surface.

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The band saw is used for cutting precise shapes and curves in wood.

Tracing paper is used to sketch on a plain paper and stick it on the wood to start carving accordingly.

Different types of chisels and a brush are used to carve the wood in required shapes.

Sandpaper is used to smooth the surface after the wood carving is completed.

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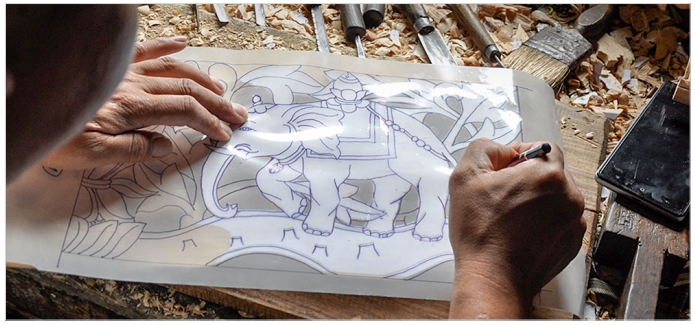
Making Process

Buddhist wood carving stands out from other forms due to its amalgamation of traditional as well as modern disposition. Their expression, patterns, and ability to be transpired to any viable form won them a unique identity in the crafts market. Generally, well-seasoned timber of teak or pine wood is used for these wood carvings. According to requirements, small planks are made ready prior to any orders, to be shaped into the required size and shapes later. The artisans maintain and reassure the thickness of the prepared structures with the help of motorized machines and tools. Once the rough wooden body is ready, an attractive design is sketched on a tracing sheet to be later traced onto the wooden surface. Here the excess wood is chopped off using chisels. Later the intricate designs are carved layer-by-layer on both sides of the wood. The depth and shallowness on the wooden surface depend on the type of chisel and the creative experience of the artist. Once the carving is completed, its surfaces are then smoothened with sandpaper, followed by dusting. Then the designed parts of the frame are fixed to each other to join in together firmly. Ultimately, varnish or enamel is applied to enhance the look and feel of the final product.

A wood plank is kept cut as per the measurements accordingly.

Artisan is scraping the surface of the measured wood by using a scraper.

Artisan is using an orbital sander to smoothen the surface



Artisan is sketching on the tracing paper to get printed over the white sheet, which is stuck on the wood.

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The wood piece is a being cut through a band saw as per the designed paper sheet on the wood.

The wood has been trimmed as per the designed shape.

The artisan is carving the wood as per the design.

Artisan is carving the body part of the elephant.

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Artisan is adding the details by carving the wood.

The Buddhist wall decorative has been carved completely.

After carving the artisan is smoothen the texture of decor.

Appealing Buddhist wooden wall decor is being exhibited.

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Products

The wooden carvings are modeled as per the orders from the client; hence the size and patterns also vary as per the requirement. The final price tagged on the product depends on the demanded specifications and also includes the labor charges. These Buddhist woodcarvings are always in high demand and are most admired for their magnificent detailing. Most of the products are bought by Tibetans in Himachal Pradesh. Some of the products manufactured at this unit are:

- Wood carved animals like tigers, horses, elephants, etc.
- Portraits; orders of this are taken up as per the demand.
- Thrones for gods and goddesses.
- Cravings for temples.
- Buddha idols.
- Incense stick boxes and holders

Traditional dragon flowered legs for a table is being described in detail.

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The traditional design adorns the incense burner.

Wall decorative with sacred Chinese flower surrounded by two horses in the corners.

The wooden hand-carved temple is being embellished to attribute the work of the artisans.

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Traditional Buddhist wooden wall frames are being decorated.

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This documentation was done by Professor Bibhudutta Baral and Hariharasudan T. at NID, Bengaluru.

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